



Creation, Christians and Environmental Stewardship

Ken Gnanakan ¹

ABSTRACT:

This article is based on a theoretical discussion between religion and environmentalism. The text aims to present a debate between the principles of Christianity and the theoretical discussions that are fundamental to today's environmentalist vision. It leads to a theological and culturalism argument with general concepts of the environmental movement, particularly in Western culture. The author appropriates the theological debate, with biblical texts of the Old and New Testament as a source, in order to present Biblical principles of respect for nature. Dialoguing with the concepts used in environmental movements and anthropocentrism biocentrism, this paper seeks to support Christian principles of stewardship as a theocentric environmental proposal of the relationship between humans and nature.

Keywords: Religion; Environmentalism; Stewardship; Environmental Theology.

¹ PhD pela King's College London, Londres. Fundador do Instituto ACTS (<http://www.actsgroup.org/>). Membro Consultor da International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education. Índia. ken@gnanakan.com

The intensity of environmental degradation is so obvious that it may seem irrelevant to ask questions like “Should we be concerned?” or even “Why should we be concerned.” But responses are still surprisingly naïve! While most Christians will be alarmed about environmental degradation, they will still question the need for any direct action as Christians. “This will take away from our priority of preaching the Gospel,” some will react. They would argue that environmental issues are only for government and specialized non-government agencies, certainly not for the church. And those who get involved will only justify their action as something good and creditable, or even urgent but with not because of any direct connection to the Gospel.

A strong attack on the biblical doctrine of creation was issued by Lynn White Jr. and this could be a good starting point to help challenge our complacency (White Jr 1967). White argued that the teaching that “it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends,” has largely contributed to our present predicament. The Genesis passages commanding Adam and Eve to “rule” and have “dominion” are shown to have led to an arrogant exploitation of nature. These texts have received much scholarly attention recently, and renewed attempts have been made to understand their meaning within their right context. But the burden rests heavily on us to correct any such impressions that the Bible has actually commanded us to do whatever we want with creation.

Lynn White Jr. added further:

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper end (White Jr 1967).

Lynn White’s small but seminal article delivered as a lecture in 1966 has been more often quoted than any other environmental challenge and demands our attention. It raises two questions. The first question is - does the Bible authorize exploitation of the created order? And second, is Christianity an anthropocentric religion?

There are various ways in which we can respond to these challenges and the scope of our treatment can be even wider. But considering the fact that we are dedicating these articles to Brian Wintle, a dedicated biblical scholar, I will restrict my treatment to a biblical exposition that will help us develop a responsible Christian attitude to get involved.

WHAT IS THE BASIS OF OUR INVOLVEMENT?

Let us begin on a more positive note and consider one of the main reasons for our involvement in environmental action. These are our opening words as we often repeat the Apostles Creed – “I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth.” In doing this we affirm our faith in

a Creator God. This means, our environmental action is something we cannot help but demonstrate being God's created beings and living within the wider created order. Such a positive start will help us negate the attitude that many Christians still hold - the world is evil and too much of involvement in the world (or with creation) will make us "worldly."

A careful look at the Bible will reveal that ecological and environmental concerns are very much central to its message. The Word of God starts with the glorious account of God's creation. God promised the best of created things to the people he made to be his own. The prophets looked forward to a renewed creation. Jesus displayed a very positive attitude to all that was around him. Paul spoke about creation groaning for redemption, just as much as human beings are groaning.

BEGINNING WITH CREATION

One of the first things to do is to recover a positive attitude towards creation and challenge the notion that the world and creation is evil. We must start with the powerful truth that there is an ongoing relationship between God and his creation. In saying God is Creator, we are affirming that it is God who is Lord, and that it is God who is the initiator, the sustainer and therefore continues to graciously relate to a creation of which we are only a part. The Bible claims that it is through creation that even God may be known. "The heavens proclaim his righteousness and all the peoples see his glory." (Psalm 97.6) Several other portions of the Scriptures (for instance Psalm 19.1f.) bear testimony to God's glorious manifestation through creation.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggeman graphically depicts the systemic beauty of harmony and obedience between the Creator and creation as a process of communication. He calls it "speaking and listening." God creates by speaking and therefore the responsibility of creation is to listen and answer. Communication between partners is built on speaking and listening. Creation is an intimate and valuable partner with its creator, not just an object constructed or put together for pleasure (Brueggeman 1977 p.6).

In becoming a partner God does not lose his distance from creation. He is both transcendent and immanent. This bond between the Creator and the creation is aptly explained by Brueggemann in terms of "closeness" and a "distance." While closeness signifies a constant care between creator and creation, distance underlines the individuality, identity and the respect that one shows to other. And this applies to both Creation to Creator. Each has its place of honour and purpose, and each is related to the other through this inextricable bond.

This kind of a relationship avoids any confusion caused pantheism or dualism. Pantheism states that God is everywhere and in everything. Some environmentalists sound the praises of Hinduism claiming that it evokes a sense of respect for creation, which is otherwise lacking in the Christian religion. But monistic Hinduism, pantheistic in essence, confuses the Creator with creation making even humans to be identical with God. Added to this confusion is the teaching of *maya* or illusion. Creation is only illusion, even if it is seen to have an identity in God. Dualistic Hinduism, on the other hand, distances God from creation to the extent that there is no ongoing relationship. There is, in fact, an opposition between God and creation.

God alone, who is Lord and the source of everything, is responsible for all that is created and must not be confused with his creation. This teaching comes through the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* - out of nothing – which is a dominant note in the biblical account of God’s creative work. This doctrine refutes any pantheism that confuses the creator with creation, or a dualism that claims a confrontation between God and evil. Further, God called everything “good” and therefore there is no opposition between God and creation. Any implication of a conflict is because of Satan and sin and the constant battle of sinful human beings to independently assume charge.

WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

The biblical concepts of “image of God” and “dominion” have been topics of endless debate within discussions of environmental exploitation. Briefly, to be made in the image of God implies that humans have been created in order to responsibly represent God in creation, and in this sense exercise “dominion” not "domination" over creation. Humans are the climax of creation, we often assert implying that we are most special to God and all else is secondary. Critics show that the concept of image of God is included in the idea of dominion and both stem from the anthropocentric approach to creation which has led to exploitation and abuse of nature.

The meaning of the term “image of God” has been variedly interpreted. Commentators have seen it in many faceted dimensions - creativity, individuality, freedom etc. Whatever it means, there is one thing that will be clear – God and human beings have a link that is different to the link between God and the rest of creation. Humanity is entrusted with a special task. “By virtue of being created, it bears a responsibility; human dignity and responsibility are inseparable,” says Claus Westermann (Genesis 1987). Although “humanity exercises sovereignty over the rest of creation,” we are reminded that “there is no suggestion of exploitation.” Just like the king, whose rule responsibly serves the well being of his subjects, so humans are to responsibly care for creation.

Possessing God's image and exercising dominion, rather than being seen in authoritative or hierarchical terms, needs to indicate godly attitudes and gracious action towards nature. Too much is made of the special status of humans over and above the rest of nature by Christians, and hence it is hardly surprising that the ecological disaster has been seen to be linked with the biblical doctrine of creation. The image of God in humanity needs to be seen in terms of responsibility as well as a privilege. Humans are given the privilege of possessing a rational, moral and spiritual dimension that enables them to act creatively and responsibly towards the whole of creation. Being made in God's image we are to protect the environment in accountability towards God, and a responsibility towards our fellow creatures and the rest of creation.

CREATION AND THE FALL

While we speak of the glory of God's creation of human beings and our relationship, we cannot bypass the biblical fact of the fall. Sin and the fall clearly served to revert in part to the chaos from which creation came about. Creation continually is being pulled back into chaos by human sinful actions. Environmental complications and ecological disasters are to be expected with human beings fallen from God's originally intended purposes. But the fall has not obliterated the image of God in us. Hence, when we recognize that God is the God of order and harmony, we being God's image endeavor bring order into the present chaos. A proper assessment of the meaning of the image of God in us should help us move into this kind of involvement in our world today.

God's image must reflect something of God in us. God wants us "to keep" and "rule over." We need to carefully accept this combination. – God's love as well as God's authority must be demonstrated through human beings over all other creatures. On the one side there is caring love and responsibility, but on the other is creative power. This power is not an unquestioned autocratic rule over creation but a productive force that empowers other fellow creatures to live, create, recreate, regenerate and fulfill their purposes here on earth.

There are two insights that help tone down any overemphasis on the image of God and the special status given to us. First, there is a suggestion of what this rule is to be in the reminder that we are to rule in the same way as the sun and moon "rule" over the day and night (Gen. 1:16) It is not harsh or destructive but purposeful. Human beings made in the image of God are called to represent God's righteous rule on earth. God is to be manifest in us not only in reverence for human life but in similar reverence for the non-human creation.

Second, the New Testament reference to the image portrays Jesus Christ as the perfection of the image (2 Cor. 4.4, Col. 1.15. Heb. 1.3, John 1.14-18.) The model of Christ underlines our serving in

love and this must be underlined even more. If God's image was perfect in Jesus Christ, then this image is worthy of emulation. Jesus came to heal and not to harm. He came to carry out God's desires, not to satisfy his own cravings. When we consider such aspects of the image of God, the concept becomes a powerful tool in bringing environmental care through the Christian in our world today.

But we should also consider that when the reality of the image of God is placed in the context of human sin, fall and destruction there is bound to be manifestations of human tendency to usurp and exploit authority. Sin is rebellion against God. It is a craving for autonomy rather than life in obedience to God. Hence, as Paul says of the law in Rom 7 - "I find this law at work. When I want to do good, evil is right there within me. (Rom. 7.21). When God commands us "to guard and keep" creation, sinful humans would rebel and want to do the opposite. Creation, therefore, which was originally to be the source of blessing has turned to be a curse all because human beings chose to rebel against God.

Sin brings disharmony within God intended relationships for creation. Far too many discussions on the environmental crisis make no reference whatsoever to the biblical account of sin and the fall of humanity. Without any reference to this fact, the crisis becomes inexplicable and therefore the attack on the doctrine of creation becomes justifiable. Creation's perfection is marred by human imperfection.

The fact that it is Eve that is first enticed should not be taken to imply any blame on women. That will miss the point. What started with Eve, spread to Adam and then to all creation. The universality of sin is the underlining factor in this account. And the consequences are just as universal as the fall. The divine relationship between man and woman is now affected. Man will exploit woman. The exploitation is to extend to the entire world and creation itself suffers and groans.. The very fact that creation is also influenced by our fallen-ness shows the intricate interlinking. It is not only in our created-ness but also in fallen-ness that we identify with nature.

Discord within relationships has now entered in because of sin. At the heart of sin is rebellion. And this is clearly at the heart of all broken relationships. And when relationships are broken there is an exploitation of the stronger over the weaker. The ecological crisis is characterised by this kind of exploitation, whether it be humans over creation, or within the wider created order itself.

UNDERSTANDING DOMINION IN CONTEXT

It is now necessary for us to delve a little deeper into the wider context within which the word "dominion" is used and not just those initial chapters in Genesis. Looking at the word by itself there is reason to accept the criticism. Interestingly, while God gave the commands to 'be fruitful' and

‘multiply’ to other creatures, to man and woman was given an even greater responsibility; Adam and Eve were given the responsibility to ‘subdue’ and ‘rule’ and have dominion over all creation.

The problem to critics like White, obviously, is with the words used. The Hebrew word *kabas* and *radab* are said to be much harsher than the English translations. *Kabas* means ‘to tread down’, to bring into bondage’ or even ‘to rape’ while *radab* means ‘to trample’ or ‘to press’ and therefore to rule or dominate. The Hebrew words, like most of our Asian languages, have a rich array of meanings and need not necessarily be taken literally. As we look closer at the implications, we will get nearer to the fuller understanding as was intended in the command.

Let us consider some of the wider context for dominion:

a) *God sanctioned Dominion in love*: Very often Israel is reminded of God’s love. Ezekiel 34 depicts the prophet reminding the kings of Israel that God is shepherd. In contrast they “ruled them harshly and brutally.” The word *radab* - “rule” - is here placed alongside the concept of a caring shepherd, not the harsh and brutal leaders they are familiar with. We can confidently conclude that “dominion” or “rule” did not imply a cruel, heartless domination, but the loving and caring relationship of the shepherd to his sheep.

b) *God sanctioned dominion within a commonality*: The Hebrew ‘*adam*’ taken from the word ‘*adamah*’ meaning ground must speak for itself. There is a commonalty that exists from the start and continues right through to the end. Adam is made from the “dust of the ground” (Gen 2.7). There is an integral link with the earth as well as with the environment around. This is the reason why human sin had its toll even on the environment. Ecology implies total interconnectedness of creation, and this connectedness is not strange to the biblical teaching. There is no blue blood that divides royalty from the common folk. Rightly, in the English language, we are referred to as “earthlings”. Dominion, seen within this context of commonalty takes on a healthy perspective. It is a responsibility for others with common rights.

c) *God commanded dominion with responsibility*: Dominion did not permit an irresponsible exploitation. Though God gives great authority to men and women, there is the constant reminder that “this sovereign authority does not include the killing or slaughtering of animals” Similarly, when God gave dominion to man over nature (Gen. 1:26) it was not a mandate for totally annihilation. There are many other such commands (References). Proper and responsible care over creation was expected.

Responsibility alongside God’s creativity transforms authority into positive and productive expressions. Rather than destruction, there is the desire to bring something good even from the worst. God entrusts his property to men and women, resources that have limits but blessed with the potential

to multiply phenomenally. The earth contained everything human beings needed. Therefore, according to the will of God as creator, both human and animal sustenance “was to be the products of the earth alone.”()

d) *A Dominion in the interest of others:* The word ‘*maschal*’ another word that means ‘ruling over’ is used to denote the authority of the sun to govern over the day, and the moon to govern over the night (Gen. 1:16) This, interestingly, is equivalent to the authority of man to govern or to rule over his wife (Gen. 3:16). Taken in its right perspective, it did not mean harsh and domineering rule with only selfish interests. The sun and the moon had purposes for which they were created, the purpose of service to the rest of creation, and it is for the fulfilling of these purposes that any power was vested in them.

Similarly, man’s rule or dominion over woman is not to destroy her or consume her totally for his benefit Woman has her individuality. In the same way, men and women are not to destroy or to totally annihilate living creatures on earth just for their selfish satisfaction. Ultimate dominion belongs to Yahweh alone. One reminder that comes forcefully to our present world is that any rule or authority, be it political, religious or even domestic, carries privileges as well as responsibilities. When privileges are separated from responsibility exploitation is inevitable.

e) *A dominion in servanthood:* While we look at the commands given to Adam and Eve at creation, it is necessary to also consider the commands subsequently given. Man and woman in the garden are instructed to ‘till’ and ‘keep’ it. These are words that beautifully temper the harshness of the other words. The Hebrew words for them are seen in Gen. 2:15. First, there is *abad* which means ‘to till’. The noun is ‘servant’ or ‘slave.’ Serving or service, even servanthood must definitely have been implied. Humankind is to be available to serve creation, and in so doing serve the Lord God.

f) *A dominion with stewardship:* An even more powerful the word is the Hebrew *Shamar*, which means ‘to keep’. The noun form is ‘steward’ or ‘trustee’, (10) implying watchful care and preserving of the earth. (11) These aspects are being heavily underlined today as the ecological cause is assuming alarming proportions. It is a shift in emphasis from users to keepers, from consumers to conservers. The concept of stewardship will be developed much further, but here we remind ourselves that we are called to serve, keep and preserve creation which God has entrusted to us as trustees, or stewards.

g) *Dominion with Respect:* Any call to respect creation is immediately confused with calls to worship creation as in pantheistic practices. This is the plea of some environmentalists today. Criticizing biblical doctrines, they eulogize the teachings of Hinduism or Buddhism, pointing to the

deep respect these religions evokes towards creation. The Biblical doctrine of creation, they claim, has ignored this attitude. Although this could be disputed, a corrective is needed by the Christian.

Does not the Bible teach respect for creation? If God described creation as “good” there must be some inherent worth that makes it warrant much more than we have shown to it. Creation has a purpose for which it exists and it is in the fulfilling of these purposes that its existence can be fulfilled. Respect for creation will need to be seen as respect for the purposes of each aspect of God’s world. Dominion does not call for domination but for all that we see in the wider context we have just considered.

ARE CHRISTIANS ANTHROPOCENTRIC?

We now move to the second question raised. White accuses the ‘Western’ Christian doctrine of being anthropocentric, i.e. centered around human beings, and that it is the command to have dominion over creation that has led to human exploitation of nature. Science and technology have emerged from a need to have even greater control and this has not helped. Better relationships will need to be fostered, ones that will show respect for creation as in other religions. Our task for a biblical theology is clear; we will need to get back to the Genesis texts to explore the meaning and significance of these issues.

Anthropocentrism places humanity at the center. Everything in the universe is seen in terms of human values and human interests. The view was developed strongly in the post-Enlightenment period with confidence that humans can totally conquer nature for their survival and the betterment of their own kind. Anthropocentrism, we will have to admit, has become a predominant part of the modern materialistic way of life. The affluent lifestyles we are all gradually adopting within our growing economy, industrialization, and technological progress have led us subtly to accept such views. What is achievable by humans seems to be limitless, and all this with no miraculous interventions from God.

Our attention has been drawn to the deep-rooted anthropocentrism in the Western perspective even by Western writers themselves. Here is a rather elaborate quote from R A Young:

The anthropocentric predicament is somewhat paradoxical on two accounts. First, concern for personal well being and survival has raised ecological awareness to the level that many now question the anthropocentric basis for modern society. The motivating factor for change (self-preservation) and the source of the problem (self-preservation) therefore only accentuates self-centredness and the root of the problem does not go away. Second, humanistic society still approaches environmental problems from an anthropocentric perspective despite knowing that this attitude is ultimately self-destructive. To preserve wilderness areas for recreational purposes, to convert to compact fluorescents for economical purposes, or to save the rain forest because of the pharmaceutical products it can yield is to act out of anthropocentric interests. There has been much environmental activity recently, but most of it is, in one way or another, still anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism seems to be so entrenched in society that

there is an ingrained resistance against accepting the observation that humanity's priority on self is self-destructive (Young 1994 p. 117).

If anthropocentrism is problematic, the alternative that is recommended by various environmental movements is *biocentrism*. Biocentrism teaches that everything in life, nature or creation has equal value and must be respected for what it is. Traditional societies tend to be biocentric people, who relate in very practical everyday terms to the environment around them. The Earth's ecosystem is to be valued for its own sake and not for human benefit. Some ecologists issue strong reminders for us to accept that nature has value in itself. Biocentricism calls us to respect everything in our biosphere without any accent on human commercial calculations.

With Christianity attacked for its anthropocentricity, environmental groups are turning to biocentrism. Biocentrism is the emerging ecological worldview and advocated as the only hope to save humanity. This is the product of the rising ecological awareness in society, the influence of Eastern religions and philosophies, quantum physics, and a resurgence of primitive paganism and native cultural insights. All this seems to be fashionable to follow within a pop culture that has emerged.

Young comments:

Environmentalists tend to embrace this new paradigm, for it coincides not only with what the science of ecology is teaching but also with the pop philosophy of eastern mysticism. Biocentrism's focus on the web of life precludes human ascendancy. No one organism can claim supremacy over anything else, for all are needed to support the ecosystem. As a result, humans are simply part of the complex whole, no higher or lower than any other part of nature. And people are listening with open ears. This sounds like the ideal corrective for harsh anthropocentrism (Young 1994 p.125).

While biocentrism provides the needed alternative to anthropocentrism, it conflicts with the biblically justifiable solution for the Christian. It is certainly a valid corrective for the arrogance that we have been accused of, but these insights need to be placed alongside our commitment to God as Creator and one who continues to sustain this creation. Therefore, if we are to stay biblically anchored, *theocentrism* is the viewpoint we must consider.

We could turn to Paul for a definition of theocentricity as submission to the Creator God: '...in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17.28). Transposing this to the entirety of God's creation, we affirm that everything finds existence, meaning and purpose in its relationship to our Creator and Redeemer God. Our being stands or falls in relationship to this God. But with the ecological crisis and the reminders that have come, we need to clarify the focus on our theocentricity.

We can identify two varying approaches to theocentrism. One form would teach that everything exists for the sake of God and to serve his purposes. The Bible would justify this; except that some would take it to the extent of saying therefore God will rectify the damage in the new

Creation. We do not need to do anything. But there is another kind of theocentrism that fits more appropriately into our eco-conscious world today. While accepting that God ought to be the centre of all that we are and do, we must not ignore the fact that what God wants us to do something by ourselves too. God created everything, but made each one to fulfil distinct purposes. These purposes refer back to the one overarching purpose that keeps it theocentric, but maintains the distinctive place for each for its own sake. These roles should take into account even the biocentric accent that is needed in some measure. Everything in God's created order has a distinctive place, keeping the ecological balance so essential to environmental harmony. There are chains and cycles that function within creation and these take into account the role each individual part has to play.

Theocentrism in any form must underline that our relationships within creation revolve around a transcendent centre. Pure biocentrism tends to deify nature, while pure anthropocentrism will divinize humans. A relationship by itself with nature will either idolize or romanticize our dealings and not fulfill the ultimate God ordained purposes that are intended. It is when we relate to a Creator God that all else will take its rightful place. Paul Santmire suggests:

To avoid setting the human creature over against nature on the one hand (the tendency of anthropocentrism), and to avoid submerging the human creature and humanity's cries for justice on the other hand (the tendency for cosmocentrism). I am suggesting that we see both humanity and nature as being grounded, unified, and authenticated in the Transcendent, in God. This is the theocentric framework (Santmire 1985 p.49).

The Bible gives a distinct place to God as Creator. Claiming ours to be a biblical theology, our starting point must be the Bible and the forceful teaching that the transcendent God is Creator. It is this God who continues to motivate and energise us to become involved in restoring creation, towards becoming all that God has intended it to be. We have the role of being stewards in this magnificent created order recognizing that God is above all and in all that we experience.

BEING STEWARDS

Stewardship is an acceptable way to describe our position or place in relation to our role and responsibilities towards creation. John Hall, in an excellent book entitled "The Steward" stresses the "stewardship" metaphor "because it encapsulates the two sides of human relatedness, the relation to God on the one hand and to nonhuman creatures of God on the other." If this is accepted, the steward metaphor would provide the corrective for the flawed relationships that have caused devastation. "The human being is, as God's steward, accountable to God and responsible for his fellow creatures." (Hall 1990 p.26)

In the Old Testament a steward is a man who is ‘over a house’ (Gen. 43:19; 44:4; Is. 22:15, etc.) In the New Testament there are two words translated steward : *epitropos* (Mt. 20:8; Gal. 4:2), i.e. one to whose care or honour one has been entrusted, a curator or a guardian and this could appropriately describe our role in the world. Another word is *oikonomos* (Lk. 16:2-3; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10), i.e. a manager, a superintendent. Taken from the word *oikos* (‘house’) and *nemo* to ‘dispense’ or ‘to manage’ there is reference to the relationship within the home, an ownership with which this responsibility must be performed. However, the words are used to describe the function of delegated responsibility, as in the powerful parables of the labourers, and the unjust steward. “More profoundly, it is used of the Christian’s responsibility, delegated to him under ‘Christ’s kingly government of his own house’. All things are Christ’s and Christians are his executors or stewards.” (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25) (New Bible Dictionary [s.d.] p.1145)

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP FOR TODAY

Responsible stewardship acting in God’s love will result in practical outworking that will help develop right attitudes for living today. First, we Christians who are called to care for creation will see the need for recognition of the harmony, unity, purity, and integrity in creation. A respect for creation will elicit a respect for the rights of creation. Our care for creation will show in our love to protect, conserve and bring healing to a wounded world. Ecology, we have seen implies interrelatedness, and this will show in our own feeling of hurt for a creation that has been hurt.

Second, we are called to preserve and conserve creation’s resources. Preserving could imply abstaining from use, whereas conserving calls for responsible use. Conserving calls for protecting in the present for future use. We may be need to develop the responsibility to preserve some endangered species by protecting them, and conserve a forest by not only using it carefully for our present needs but protecting it for responsible use for generations in the future.

Third, responsible stewardship calls for demonstration in responsible lifestyles. Greed and materialism have caused havoc and disparity, which continues unabated with human exploitation. We are called to a life of sharing in the world’s community rather than accumulating for our selves. While this may start interpersonally, it must be realized internationally. In fact, when nations start living integrally, its people automatically develop more responsible attitudes. Some of the major ethical violations are those that have emerged through large scale international illegal operations.

Fourth, responsible stewardship calls for an acceptance of the rights and privileges of all of God’s community and creation. We must see the importance of according rights to nature as well as to other humans. One other aspect that has emerged in recent times is the need for us to demonstrate a

responsibility towards future generations. The ecological crisis has brought people to recognize the need to protect the rights of future generations. The rate at which resources are depleting in our world at present is alarming. The question is asked - How much longer will these resources last? Whatever we do must therefore ensure the fundamental rights of those in the future to have sufficient resources.

Finally, we have a responsibility towards God to honour him for the way in which he has honoured us with responsibility over all of creation. All that we have said above will fall into its right perspective when we see God as the one who invests integrity, dignity, and responsibility within humans. And in essence, our relationship to God will show in a responsible relationship to the world.

REFERENCES

- Brueggeman W 1977. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. SPCK, London, p.6
- Genesis 1987. *A Practical Commentary. Text and Interpretation*. Eerdmans, 10 pp.
- Hall DJ 1990. *The Steward – a Biblical Symbol come of Age*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, EUA, p. 26
- New Bible Dictionary. p. 1145
- Santmyre HP 1985. *Travail of Nature - the Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p. 49.
- White Jr L 1967. The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis. *Science* 155(3767): 1203-1207.
- Young RA 1994. *Health the Earth - A Theocentric perspective on Environmental Problems and their Solutions*. Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville.

Criação, Cristãos e “Environmental Stewardship”

RESUMO

Este artigo se fundamenta numa discussão teórica entre religião e ambientalismo. O texto tem por finalidade apresentar um debate entre os princípios do cristianismo e as discussões teóricas que fundamenta a visão ambientalista nos dias atuais. O caminho é uma discussão teológica e culturalista com conceitos gerais do movimento ambientalista, sobretudo na cultura ocidental. O autor se apropria do debate teológico, tendo como fonte textos bíblicos do antigo e novo testamento, como forma de apresentar os princípios bíblicos do respeito à natureza. Dialogando com os conceitos usados nos

movimentos ambientais como antropocentrismo e biocentrismo, procura fundamentar os princípios cristãos da environmental stewardship como uma proposta teocêntrica da relação entre os humanos e natureza.

Palavras chave: Religião; Ambientalismo; Stewardship; Teologia Ambiental.

Data Submissão: 26/09/2015

Data Aceite: 24/11/2015